

BLM UNCOMPAHGRE FIELD OFFICE
RMP PLANNING FACT SHEET
Wild and Scenic Rivers

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The BLM Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) is revising the Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Uncompahgre planning area. The Uncompahgre RMP will provide detailed information about the current state of resources on public lands within the planning area, and set forth a plan of action for managing those resources for the next twenty or so years under the BLM's dual mandate of *multiple use* and *sustained yield*.

**WHEN IS A
STREAM A RIVER?**

In the WSR Act, a *river* refers to a flowing body of water or estuary or a section, portion, or tributary thereof, including rivers, streams, creeks, runs, kills, rills, and small lakes.

Congress authorized the National Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) Act in 1968 to preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The Act safeguards the special character of these rivers, while allowing for their appropriate use and development, and encouraging river management that crosses political boundaries and promotes public participation in river protection.

What is the WSR study process?

The Act requires the BLM to assess river segments under its management

as part of its resource management planning process. The study and designation of rivers consists of a multi-step process: **eligibility** → **suitability** → **congressional action**. Only Congress or (under certain circumstances) the Secretary of the Interior may designate a river for inclusion in the WSR system. The UFO currently does not manage any WSR-designated segments.

What makes a segment eligible for WSR consideration?

The first step in the WSR study process is to determine which river segments meet eligibility criteria. To be eligible, a river segment must be **free-flowing** and possess one or more **outstandingly remarkable values** (ORV). ORVs may be scenic, recreational, geological, fish or wildlife related, historic, cultural, botanical, hydrological, or paleontological. ORVs must be of a quality or scarcity that makes them unique, rare, or exemplary within the region. In addition, rivers must have sufficient water quality to support those values.

What did the UFO study determine?

During the inventory phase, 174 river segments were identified for review. After evaluating these segments, 34 segments on 23 rivers were determined to be free-flowing and possessed one or more ORVs necessary to meet WSR eligibility requirements. In addition, one segment of the Dolores River was deemed eligible by a neighboring field office. The northernmost portion of this segment is managed by the UFO, and will be evaluated during the suitability phase, resulting in a total of 35 draft eligible river segments.

**PRELIMINARY RIVER
CLASSIFICATION GUIDELINES**

Wild: Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted.

Scenic: Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads.

Recreational: Those rivers or sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shorelines, and that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past.



What is meant by “free-flowing”?

Free-flowing means that there are no dams or diversions along a river segment that impound a significant amount of water for extended periods. It is not necessary for a river to have a completely natural flow regime to be considered free-flowing. For example, Congress has designated WSR segments immediately below major water storage projects.

What’s next?

The next step will be to finalize the eligibility report. The BLM will look at scoping comments submitted in response to the draft report, modify the report as needed in light of new information received, and publish the Final WSR Eligibility Report.

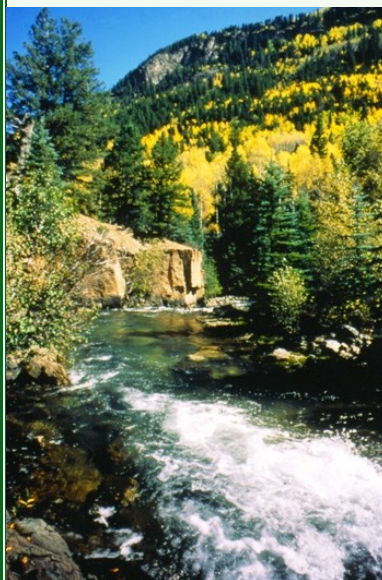
How does the BLM manage eligible segments?

BLM policy is to protect ORVs identified in an eligibility study until a decision on suitability can be made. The BLM must protect the free-flowing character, preliminary classification, and ORVs of eligible segments. Future management actions will comply with these interim protective measures until a decision on suitability is made.

Then What?

The BLM will then evaluate *suitability*. This phase determines which of the eligible segments the BLM will recommend to Congress for inclusion in the National WSR System. This is done as part of the RMP revision process. During the suitability phase the BLM will ask for stakeholder help to analyze various management prescriptions, and positive and negative impacts of various designations for each segment. Together we will work to identify how stream-related values can best be protected and enhanced, and consider potential impacts to other values such as water supply. As part of the process, BLM will consider alternatives to WSR designation for managing water-related values.

The suitability phase addresses several management considerations, including:



- Should the river’s free-flowing character, water quality, and ORVs be protected, or are one or more other uses important enough to warrant doing otherwise?
- Is protection of identified ORVs within management control? River segments with adjacent private lands may not be appropriate for WSR designation.
- Will historical or existing rights be adversely affected?
- Will the river’s free-flowing character, water quality, and ORVs be protected through designation? Is it the best method for protecting the river corridor? The benefits and impacts of WSR designation must be evaluated, and alternative protection methods considered.
- Is there a demonstrated commitment to protect the river by any non-federal entities who may be partially responsible for implementing protective management?

How will stakeholder and public involvement be incorporated into the suitability determination?

Suitability evaluation is designed to be a highly inclusive process, with numerous opportunities for stakeholders and the public to get involved. The first opportunity is during the current RMP scoping period.

Do the BLM’s WSR determinations create any federal water rights to protect the ORVs?

No. A federal water right is not created unless Congress designates a stream segment and identifies the need for a federal water right.

Where can I get more in-depth information?

The website www.rivers.gov is an excellent resource for detailed information related to the National WSR System, including the WSR, the eligibility and suitability processes, and agency guidance.

UFO Planning Webpage:
www.UFORMP.com

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